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State Dept. Defends Its Consular Officer in Guyana

By GRAHAM HOVEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 — The State Department strongly defended Richard A. McCoy today but said that it was continuing to investigate his conduct as the United States consular officer in Guyana with responsibility for dealing with the People's Temple settlement of Jonestown.

"Our investigations to date lead us to the conviction that Mr. McCoy performed his duties as our chief consular officer in Georgetown in a manner completely consonant with the highest standards of professional competence and ethical behavior," said the department spokesman, Hodding Carter 3d.

Mr. Carter had been asked at the department's daily press briefing to comment on an Associated Press dispatch from Georgetown that quoted from People's Temple documents that indicated a close relationship between Mr. McCoy and the settlement.

'Legitimate Needs'

The spokesman said that it had been necessary for Mr. McCoy to maintain a "working relationship" with People's Temple representatives because that large community of United States citizens had "perfectly legitimate needs for consular services."

"It in fact became increasingly difficult to maintain such a relationship because of Mr. McCoy's own suspicions of the People's Temple and because of their increasing hostility toward Mr. McCoy," Mr. Carter said.

"This was partially because Mr. McCoy had frequent contact with Guyanese police officials concerning the People's Temple. The People's Temple leaders were apparently aware of these contacts."

Mr. Carter issued his statement after a vigorous debate within the State Department over the last week on how best to defend Mr. McCoy's reputation and career as a Foreign Service officer without jeopardizing relations with Guyana or with Congress, officials said.

Open Defense Urged

One faction has argued that Mr. McCoy should be allowed to attend the press briefing and defend himself against charges that he was lax about investigating allegations by relatives in the United States of repression and forced detention in the Jonestown community.

Some officials in this group have said privately that Mr. McCoy pressed his efforts to persuade the Guyanese police to investigate Jonestown so energetically that some of his State Department superiors felt he was exceeding his brief as a consular officer.

Thus far, however, officials said, Deputy Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher, to whom the argument has been referred several times, has sided with the group that believes it would set an unwise precedent to permit Mr. McCoy to speak out publicly and that it could damage relations with the Guyanese Government.

Commenting on Jonestown in an interview with The New York Times last week, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham said, "Essentially, it's an American problem of these cultists." But State Department officials have insisted that only the Guyanese authorities could have carried out a thorough investigation of the People's Temple settlement.

Zablocki Seeks Answers

Department officials also said that they were concerned about presenting their side of the Guyanese tragedy, including a detailed account of the Jonestown investigations by consular officers, to the House International Relations Committee before making it generally available.

Representative Clement J. Zablocki, Democrat of Wisconsin, chairman of the committee, has asked the department to provide answers to a wide-ranging series of questions about the Guyanese incident.

Officials said that they were still culling answers to Mr. Zablocki out of a mass of documents and did not wish to risk offending him by making too many of their responses public before they had been delivered to him.

Mr. Carter said today that consideration was still being given to the idea of allowing Mr. McCoy to appear at a press briefing in his own defense at some future date.

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12/6

DELAWARE TO FREE BODIES OF CULTISTS

But Cremation and Burial in Other States Are Uncertain Without Any Death Certificates

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN
Special to The New York Times

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del., Dec. 5 — Delaware officials today cleared a major legal obstacle to the shipment of bodies of members of the People's Temple from here to other communities in the country. Despite this, however, it is unclear whether any of the bodies can be buried or cremated in any state because there are no death certificates for the more than 900 cultists who died in Guyana almost three weeks ago.

Death certificates, required for burial in virtually all states, are usually filled out in the jurisdictional area where a person died. But the bodies were flown out of Guyana without any death certificates. Apparently, State Department officials did not request the certificates because they did not foresee their importance.

The legal step taken by Delaware officials was a move to issue "letters of transmit" to allow bodies that have been identified and claimed by next of kin to be shipped out of state.

Dover Air Force and State Department officials said that they did not know how many bodies would qualify because they were not tabulating statistics on the disposition of the bodies.

States' Views Unknown

Although Delaware's action cleared the way for shipment of bodies to other states, it is not known whether they would be accepted for burial or cremation without death certificates.

As of tonight, 551 bodies have been identified. Although all 911 bodies sent here have been prepared for burial, none had been released from Dover Air Force Base as of tonight, according to Maj. Robert W. Groom, a spokesman for the airbase.

Fred E. Stern, press secretary to Gov. Pierre S. du Pont 4th, said that the decision to issue letters of transmit had been based on receipt of a photocopy of a telegram sent by the Solicitor General of Guyana to the Department of State verifying that the 911 bodies had been legally removed from the South American country.

However, Mr. Stern said that Delaware officials would not allow removal of other categories of bodies from the Dover Air Force Base until death certificates were available.

No Mass Burial

"Unclaimed and unidentified bodies cannot be removed from Dover Air Force Base," he said, adding, "Claimed and identified bodies, for which there are requests to bury them in Delaware, cannot be removed in the absence of death certificates."

Meanwhile, Catherine Lee Marshall, a spokesman for the State Department, said that the department had made no decision regarding the disposal of unclaimed and unidentified bodies. However, it did rule out a mass burial in Delaware.

Solution of questions about how to dispose of the bodies has become a major political issue in Delaware.

Mr. Stern said that Delaware officials want the cultists' bodies moved out of the state as soon as possible.

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